

Women Performing: Creating a bond through harmony.

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Maria McNeill, March 2000.

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Preamble

In taking up the challenge of writing this report I brought to the process field work research done in 1999 for Soci 602.¹ This research involved a women's performance group made up of a chorus of ninety plus women and several quartets. The Christchurch City Chorus of Sweet Adelines International are a cappella singers who harmonize in the barbershop style. They are part of a wider New Zealand organisation and at the same time are also part of the international organisation which has its headquarters in the United States of America.

The women's barbershop organisation began in the United States in 1945. The founding members were women who had family connections to an older organisation of men barbershoppers. Both the men's and women's organisations have spread throughout the world in the intervening years. While some research has been conducted by Robert A Stebbins and Max Kaplan, into this form of "serious leisure" in the United States and Canada, very little if any research has previously been carried out in New Zealand.

I have been privileged to have been actively involved with the women's organisation for five years prior to taking up my studies at Lincoln University. This prior association with the organisation may have been instrumental in giving me the opportunity to undertake my fieldwork with the Christchurch City Chorus.

My objectives in continuing with this research have been to deepen my appreciation of the theoretical background to my fieldwork and to further my understanding of barbershoppers as performers. I was particularly interested in familiarising myself with other studies which had been done in this area such as Robert A Stebbins' book *The Barbershop Singer: inside the musical world of a musical hobby*. I also needed to

¹ See Appendix I for the Soci 602 paper.

explore the concept of "serious leisure" as it has been developed by Stebbins with a particular view to understanding how the concept has been applied to this art form. Another further objective was to explore the concept of "mateship" as it has been used in New Zealand. In my original paper for Soci 602 I proposed that this concept may make sense of the exclusivity of the social aspects of the women's organisation. The Summer Scholarship gave me an opportunity to follow-up this conjecture.

While plans for further interviews with some of the women did not eventuate, a further objective of attendance at a regional workshop weekend was achieved. The purpose of attending this workshop was to experience being a participant observer and to also give something back to the chorus. I did that by videoing all the workshops for them for their future reference. The regional workshop was held in Christchurch at the end of November and was attended by women from many different choruses throughout the South Island as well as several from the North Island. The weekend was facilitated by the immediate past president of the international organisation.

Introduction

Singing has a special significance for people; whether male or female, alone or together. Throughout history it has been used as a unique form of communication; a way of uniting people and creating a bond. Not only is the music, the sound and the harmonies important but so are the words. They give people the means to communicate in a way which can be recognised universally.

When the women of a Sweet Adeline's chorus sing together in four part harmony, they are communicating not only with the Director and through her to the audience beyond, but also with each other. Many feelings and emotional experiences can be expressed in this unity of sound. The time they spend learning how to make the performance as flawless as possible harmonically and vocally creates the unity of sound experienced by those who listen, the audience. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi refers to "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" as the flow experience². Individuals become completely absorbed in their activity and this creates the "flow experience"³.

Participants who have been or are currently in quartets suggested that for any four women who form a quartet this particular experience is the most intense because they are self directed. They can "speak" directly to the audience. When the quartet is rehearsing its members tend to stand together turned inward in a semicircle to allow for a greater appreciation of how each part fits in the song. They can decide how they want to "sell the song" without interpretation from the director. This makes the communication one of much greater intensity for the singers. As my fieldnotes revealed the relationship which is built through the experience of performing is one which these women have not found anywhere else.

² Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. p. 36.

³ Gidlow, B. (1993). The sociology of leisure. In Perkins, H.C. & Cushman, G. (Eds.), *Leisure, Recreation and Tourism* (pp. 157-170). Auckland: Longman Paul.

It seemed to me that this experience could be described as parallel to that which some men in New Zealand have known. The concept of "mateship" for men appears to describe a closeness of experience and a bond between men which has been formed through defining experiences. The women of Sweet Adelines also have a defining experience of unity which creates a bond not experienced in other areas of their lives. For men, "mateship" can be seen in the male's preference for other male company in many social situations. In interviewing these women I also found the expression of this gendered preference. This appears to occur particularly when either gender has had a moving emotional experience of some kind while in the pursuit of a strongly preferred goal. Whether it is on the sports field or on the 'risers'⁴ both male and female are molded by the creation of this bond.

When the women of this chorus socialise together, many of them feel that this social communication is best if it is limited to the chorus members themselves. This is not because they don't love or want to be with their husbands or partners, but because something happens in the process of continuous rehearsals, workshops, coaching weekends and performing which makes this an experience that can't easily be shared. Performing for that vital six minutes (which is what it takes to become the champions at their art form, in concerts or for the public in other settings) can become a chosen lifestyle, a way of life for many of the members.

There are global aspects to this friendship bond. On becoming a Sweet Adeline, ordinary women discover not only that they now have more "sisters" than they ever dreamed possible in their chorus, but that they have a relationship with other women all over the world. Anywhere they travel they will find other women doing the same work as them, learning the same songs, practicing the same vowel sounds and singing the same "tags".

This, at times, overwhelming emotional connection is reinforced during "mass" singing, which form part of National competitions in New Zealand. Here hundreds of women sing the same songs and this reinforces the connections between them. At International Conventions in the United States of America, thousands of women of all

⁴ Risers are the steps which the chorus stands on while performing in formal situations and they are also used during rehearsals.

languages can do the same. Through these connections and experiences there develops a recognition that, while you may be an individual alone on the risers with responsibility to sing to your potential, you can never be without friends again while you are part of this global sisterhood.

History and Background

Sweet Adelines began with a group of women who enjoyed singing close harmony. The organisation came into being in 1945 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The only requirements for joining the original group were that it was limited to women and that they should want to have fun and enjoy singing. Within four years the group had grown to more than 1,500 members who were singing in 35 chapters and 60 quartets in 14 different states. They adopted bylaws and elected national officers and created a system for adjudicating national annual competitions to select the best women's barbershop quartet.

The systems of governing and parliamentary procedure, finances and leadership development which were created by the original women still continue in much the same form as they did 53 years ago. The original purpose of Sweet Adelines was to educate, teach and train its members in musical harmony and appreciation. This objective was reached by encouraging and promoting barbershop quartets and other groups and giving public and private performances.

Today there are choruses and their associated quartets throughout the world. In New Zealand there are seven hundred women members in twenty-three choruses with approximately twenty-five quartets formed from those choruses.⁵ My research concentrated on the Christchurch City Chorus. This chorus has more the ninety members.⁶ Christchurch City Chorus also has a number of women who are members of quartets.⁷

⁵ From antidotal evidence given by the Director of Christchurch Chorus in her position as Educational Co-ordinator on the Regional Management Team.

⁶ The Director has a long term goal to increase the numbers to 120 members.

⁷ Some of this introduction was taken from my previous paper; see Appendix.

My fieldwork was undertaken with Christchurch City Chorus in New Zealand from July to October 1999. I also attended a weekend workshop in November 1999 where women from around the South Island and a number from the North Island attended. This was a coaching weekend facilitated by the immediate past president of Sweet Adelines International. The coach has thirty years experience in the organisation, a degree in psychology and many years experience in top management positions in the organisation as well as considerable music knowledge.

Serious Leisure

Robert A Stebbins designated barbershop singing as serious leisure but a hobby rather than an amateur or professional pursuit. While some in the barbershop world would consider the top quartets as performing at a professional level, Stebbins suggests that this claim is not acceptable as there is no equivalent professional group setting the standards to verify this claim. However, he does consider that barbershop singing in both of its forms, that of chorus or quartet singing, has a unique contribution to make to the world of serious leisure.⁸

Stebbins defines serious leisure as having a number of important components. These include *perseverance*, which operates at a level higher than casual leisure, but not as high as some occupations, and a *career path*. This career path has all the elements of any other career. There is a beginning phase of *settling in*, commitment to gaining the necessary skills, knowledge of the written and unwritten rules codes and ethics and developing active experience in the use of these skills and knowledge. There is an *advancement* phase where responsibilities and challenges are undertaken and where gains are made in personal development. As these challenges are assimilated, advancement through the system or organisation continues until a level is reached when the participant decides to complete the process. At this stage and during each of the earlier phases the careerist may take on the role of teacher to other careerists who follow behind. The final phase described by Stebbins, is *disengagement* when the participant leaves the career or retires.

⁸ Stebbins, Robert A. (1996) *The Barbershop Singer Inside the social world of a musical hobby*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p. 46-47.

Stebbins suggests that the benefits available from serious leisure activities are those of "self-actualization, self enrichment, feelings of group accomplishment and enhancement of self-image". Along with these benefits, serious leisure can bring to those involved a "unique social world composed of special norms, beliefs, values, morals, events, principles, and traditions". This "world" enables the participants to "identify strongly with their avocation".⁹

It appears that few respondents in Stebbins' study had any knowledge of barbershop before their first important contact with either the men's or women's organisations. I interviewed six women from a chorus of ninety. Many more volunteered and two were asked to participate because of their special position in the chorus at the time. I felt that their years of experience and knowledge of the development of their chorus gave them an insight into the organisation that other more recent members may not have. I found that five out of the six women I interviewed were introduced to barbershop by a current chorus member while only one woman had heard it advertised through the media and went along without knowing any other members in the chorus.

Stebbins found that two thirds of his respondents were introduced by a current member, were singing with another group prior to being introduced to barbershop and were motivated by "an insufficient opportunity to sing choral music".¹⁰ I found that most had not sung at all previously but had always wanted to or they had last sung with a choir when at school.

A number of these new members of the women's chorus brought extensive musical knowledge to the chorus and other useful skills which have been of benefit to the chorus in general in improving their achievement levels. New members are encouraged to take on the musical education programs available through the organisation, such as the "Director Certification Program". As part of this programme the member is encouraged to direct one of the chorus songs. During the period when

⁹ Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 48.

I was observing the chorus, several different women directed particular songs which they described as "my song" during rehearsals.

Another area important to the barbershop style, for which it is useful to have a background knowledge of movement and dance, is choreography. This is a part of the barbershop experience which makes it so different to other singing groups. Because movement is important to this art form, a chorus needs someone in their group who can design the movements for the chorus to perform when singing an "up tune". The choreography, if performed well, will enhance the audiences' experience of that song. The Christchurch City Chorus has such a member. She has a background in dance and has made an important contribution to chorus development.

Education is an important feature of Sweet Adelines International, whose mission is to "educate women to sing four-part harmony, barbershop style, to develop an appreciation for this art form, and to give public and private performances" To fulfill this purpose, the Sweet Adelines International Board offers education to members from all over the world. A number of the senior members of the Christchurch Chorus, along with many other women from around the world, attended an International Education Symposium earlier in the year where they were exposed to the latest ideas and teachings from the parent organisation with regard to the music movement and management of the chorus.

The written and unwritten rules and the codes or ethics associated with barbershop are important aspects which, when internalised, give the new member the feeling of being part of and belonging to the social world of barbershop. While it appears to take some time for new members to feel part of the group, they are encouraged to get involved in the organisation of the chorus. This is seen as a way to gain an understanding of the background processes of the chorus and the international organisation.

Most of my interviewees found that it took up to twelve months to feel completely comfortable as members of the chorus. Several of them suggested to me that this was because of the size of the group (it took longer to get to know other members), the complexity of the art form (some may have voice problems which they have to

overcome e.g. tremelo) and just the volume of learning that the new member has to do to gain confidence in singing in this style.

This has been recognised as a problem for retention of new members by the chorus and the wider organisation, and has been addressed in several ways. There is now a seven week program specifically to help new members learn the necessary skills to be able to take their places more easily on the 'risers'. The Christchurch chorus has a system of 'buddies' where older members in the same section take responsibility for a new member and help them feel part of the group. There are also members of the chorus who take responsibility for those who have not yet passed their audition (which is required for acceptance into the chorus).

Further help comes from an older member who runs an etiquette group for new members to help them learn the specifics of the unwritten rules and terms used within barbershop singing. These may include such terms and unwritten rules as "hang ten" which refers to standing on the front of the risers, and not interrupting four women who are singing in a quartet by joining in with them.

Stebbins found that there can be a delay before new barbershoppers find "the rewards it has to offer"¹¹ This is because there are 'costs' which must be measured against the pleasurable aspects of the hobby. He found that new members needed to be exposed as soon as possible to a thrilling event, usually a competition performance, for them to gain an appreciation of the most enriching aspects of this hobby. Once this has been experienced, most members appear to be less likely to drift away from this form of leisure.¹²

Stebbins described the three ways that new members of a barbershop chorus can get involved with the organisation and their particular chorus and in the process launch a serious leisure career for themselves. These include "...joining or forming a quartet, developing as a singer and performing service work"¹³. Stebbins suggests that the first two "...offer an opportunity to pursue a substantial self-actualizing and self-

¹¹ Ibid, p. 60.

¹² Ibid, p. 60.

¹³ Ibid, p. 50.

expressive personal interest." He suggests the third has a different result in that it "...calls on the altruistic spirit of the barbershopper to serve his or her art as a volunteer".¹⁴

Sweet Adelines International encourages fellow barbershoppers to seek empowerment through this "hobby". As women take on new roles in the chorus they develop skills that they may not have had the opportunity to gain previously. Several of my respondents spoke about what it was like for them when they became members of the organisation and took on what Stebbins calls 'service' roles.

...when you first start it does your ego so much good because everybody thinks you are so wonderful and so helpful. They say things like 'you know you can do this and gosh you are doing so well' and you think, 'Wow this is really cool'. (Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

...when she asked me to go on the Board... I said OK but I'm not very good at anything. I had no confidence. She said just come on the Board and we will find you a job which will suit you and you will be great. They build your confidence up don't they...the first year I was Social [committee] and that was great and it was fairly easy. And then the next year I became President...I was President for two years and had terrific support...the board was great...(Interview Four from field work for Soci 602).

Another interviewee felt that she took on the service role too soon after joining her chorus and found it rather difficult but at the same time she still experienced significant personal benefits from being in a leadership position.

...I was very new. I had only been in the chorus two years. Looking at it now I think I would enjoy it heaps more now I know more...but I certainly loved the people and the support. Like when you stood in front of them [the chorus] for something and they all hushed for you...then you would sort of think 'Wow I've got these people in the palm of my hand and it would almost bring tears to

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

me because its great respect and that was wonderful. I would have done anything and I still would do anything for the chorus...(Interview Six from field work for Soci 602).

Some Christchurch Chorus members have developed a serious leisure career following their association with barbershop. Their involvement, while still members who sing with the chorus and possibly a quartet, has enabled them to achieve in their personal lives and has helped the organisation grow and develop throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The Director of the Christchurch Chorus is part of the regional management team and responsible for the education of the fellow barbershoppers throughout the country.

Another member has been acting as a liaison for the presidents of the twenty-three choruses throughout New Zealand and several further members have been involved with the organisation of national competitions. These members have progressed through the organisation by joining the chorus and typically after two or three years they have been elected to a chorus board position or have been invited to be part of the music or visual design teams or have become assistant directors.

Global Aspects.

The motto of Sweet Adelines International is to "Harmonise the World". It has spread throughout the world becoming a captivating hobby for more than thirty thousand women since its beginnings in June 1945. It now has a presence in New Zealand, United States, Canada and also in Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, Panama Canal Zone and the United Kingdom.¹⁵ When the fiftieth anniversary convention was held in New Orleans in 1995, many New Zealand members were there to cheer on the Christchurch City Chorus which had won the right to compete along with winners from all the other regions, by being the New Zealand national champions. Not all the members who had been part of the winning chorus were able to afford the expense

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

involved in getting to the States but those who made the trip found it a "wonderful experience".

One of my interviewees described her feelings at these competitions as different from those she has experienced in New Zealand.

...everything was different. The excitement for one...Because we has spent such a lot of money to get [there] I thought, as a lot of the others felt and said so later. I wasn't a bit nervous. Very excited. Thinking 'God I've spent all this money and all this work and effort to get here I'm going to enjoy every moment of it'. We are on stage six minutes. I'm going to remember everything and have a hell of a good time. I don't know that we sang particularly well but I remembered everything...it was wonderful. I think just the share volume of people over there and they are all screaming for you.(Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

Another important aspect in the relationship between the global organisation and the local member is realising that there are women all over the world who sing the same songs as you. Women from New Zealand have been able to connect with their 'sisters in harmony' throughout the world when they travel. This is reciprocated with generous support given by New Zealand women to coaches and other barbershoppers who are visitors to New Zealand. The Director of the Christchurch Chorus has found this global connection a source of friendship and learning which has enhanced her experience of this hobby.

...We are in constant contact with people around the world as friends. We become life long friends. Just recently I returned from a trip...I was billeted all the way...Its like you have got friends without even knowing.(Interview Three from field work for Soci 602).

The Director also felt that the interactions with other barbershoppers around the world could be very useful learning tools which she could then bring back to New Zealand and apply here with her chorus and with other choruses through her role as Educational Co-ordinator on the Regional Management Team.

...They may have new ways of saying things and they will have had other

coaches and other people teaching. There are cultural things to take care of too. [For instance] you can hear a difference in the Swedish voices ...they are much more resonant than Kiwis. Its just learning how to use and apply things...or it could be artistic delivery of music, acting skills...You can learn heaps from people. Give them a chance and they will teach you something. (Interview Three from field work for Soci 602).

The Director of a Chorus is very important to the culture and level of achievement of a particular chorus. This particular Director has been described as one of the reasons why the women who belong to this Chorus, have a very long and successful association with barbershopping. She has been described as charismatic, strong and able to be trusted.

...She is a strong leader and she's got some definite opinions...I think she holds the Chorus together. You know we are very fortunate to have her...so strong and so direct and so knowledgeable...when she makes a decision...especially musically she's so well respected for that. She's just so 100% enthusiastic about everything...I have never seen her doubtful...(Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

When I asked V what special qualities she brought to the role of director she explained why she was a director.

...I love music, and I have the ability to interpret music, and show emotion, and direct from the heart, instead of from the hands and the brain. That's the difference. To actually lead people, guide them towards high achievement, without fear of failure, and without fear of losing 'mana' or without an ego hurt or even accepting that *you might get hurt* sometimes but you just lay everything out on the line...(Interview Three from field work for Soci 602).

Supporting Each Other.

Another special aspects which appears to make this group different from other singing groups is the level of support which members offer to each other when there is an illness or family crisis. All of my interviewees were able to describe occasions when this support had been very important to them at difficult times in their lives.

...they are so supportive. It makes you take a step back really. I remember thinking "Gosh why do they do this for me" ...my mother was up here...she had a heart attack and I mean nobody knew Mum...and when she was in hospital...somebody arrived with food, and muffins, and soup...they went to visit her in hospital and sent cards and it was really wonderful. Really wonderful, just so supportive. Nobody asked them to do it they just do it. And its helped me because now I think twice...and it makes me try and be more thoughtful. (Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

The Director also described how she felt when she needed to be supported by her chorus after a sudden illness.

...having had the opportunity to be looked after by many of my chorus members I would say that this does not happen in normal life...(Interview Three from field work for Soci 602).

The bond between the women is important on social occasions. These social events are usually restricted to the chorus members and this is also a feature of the international organisation. An interviewee explained how she felt about this aspect of the life of the chorus.

...There's a lot of things that we have in common... You can just have a good laugh and let your hair down...especially for people like me who don't work. I need to have a bit of a giggle and let my hair down and not be surrounded by men's disapproving glares occasionally. It's not even that really. They just sort of sit there wanting to be somewhere else...[When asked if she thought that men felt like that too she replied]...I don't know what men talk about, probably work, or sport...They probably don't do a hell of a lot more than we do except we have a much better time doing it...(Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

Another interviewee described how she felt about what appears to be a very close personal connection between the members.

...we just all really work together; just all there for the same reasons because we love what we're doing, we love singing, the companionship, something that we as women are doing for ourselves. We are all just striving for excellence I

guess and we all really want to be the very best that we can be...we just enjoy each others company...It's like having ninety sisters which you don't have to buy birthday presents for...we are all best of friends I suppose and we just really like each other...(Interview One from field work for Soci 602).

This is the bond which I have related to the concept of "mateship" and which is generally ascribed as being a bond between men in Aotearoa New Zealand. The concept of "mateship" for men in New Zealand and Australia has arisen through men's shared experiences at war. During this experience, groups or pairs of men, who were in close proximity to each other at the front or in the same unit, often on a chance basis, formed very strong bonds or close friendships. These bonds of "mateship" appear to have formed in response to the life-threatening danger that they faced, minute by minute, day by day. In some cases, men who had been friends at home joined up together so their friendship had a closer connection. But it was not the usual type of friendship which develops between those who have similar attitudes, rather it was a bond of necessity. At war men needed others around them whom they could count-on when danger was ever present.

Later, as the game of rugby became important to the developing nation, the men of New Zealand particularly, were able to find a connection or closeness because of the defining experience of struggle and endurance which accompanied the game. Once again chance was more important than choice in explaining why the men in a particular team shared this bond. While there are some cases of those who know each other or who are friends being together in the top teams, the usual choice of teammates is made by the selectors. Once the team is chosen then these fifteen or so men have to forge the bond through the game.¹⁶

While generally "mateship" now refers to the social aspects of the game, this bond cannot be found where a team spirit has not been developed. In his thesis comparing sporting and cultural serious careers Patrick O'Neill, (1999) has suggested that not only is winning important to the players but another "main enjoyment for amateur

¹⁶ The concept of "mateship" and the ideas regarding its formation have been developed through the material and ideas generated from Jock Phillips. (1996) *A Man's Country?: The image of the pakeha male, a history*. Auckland, N.Z.: Penguin Books.

rugby players is social: the rewards of 'mateship'¹⁷. This results from being on the team and playing the game. It seems to me that while men may also enjoy the company of other men they may not enjoy it to the same extent that these women enjoyed each other's company. While women are sharing their lives, perhaps men are comparing theirs.

Trust

It seems that the members trust each other beyond what would normally be expected in a group of this size. An interviewee talks about this aspect of the chorus experience.

...I guess trust comes into it. I think of trust with each other when I think of competitions. You know we all take responsibility for ourselves and we all trust that the other chorus members are going to do what the plan is... That's the one instance that really springs to mind for me. It's competition, the trust that we're each going to do our best...(Interview One from field work for Soci 602).

Others have described what it's like for the individual on the risers.

...You are still really quite alone. You're really quite lonely on the risers... Even though you are surrounded by people and you know they're there to back you up and you are not the only one who is up there singing. You really are quite lonely up there. You've got to be responsible for yourself...(Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

The Director had also recently experienced this sensation because on a trip to the States she had been permitted to sing with an American chorus in their regional competitions and had e-mailed back to the Christchurch Chorus about how lonely she had found the experience of being back in the chorus on the risers. This was a feeling that she didn't experience as a Director. My interviewee explains it.

...You know you are in someone else's hands really and you have to trust the

¹⁷ O'Neill, P. (1999) *"What's the Score?" A study of sporting and cultural serious leisure careers in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Lincoln University. P. 126.

Director implicitly...you have to because she's your focus and you have got to focus on something because you are a bit frightened and a bit worried...so you trust her implicitly and just focus in on her...(Interview Five from field work for Soci 602).

The Director describes the chorus as a community of people. Because of her position, she knows them intimately.

...As a Director you get to look into people's faces and see their attitudes, their lives. You can tell whether they are sick...have had fights...You get to know people really well. You can see from the way they look at you ...exactly what's happening. And that's a very special quality because you are asking them to trust you...as you are directing...you become sensitive to their needs as well and you can address it if you need to...(Interview Three from field work for Soci 602).

Quartetting

Quartetting is another way that those interested in barbershopping can get even more serious about their leisure. Stebbins has identified self-actualisation and self-expression as important rewards which can be gained from quartet singing. However, it appears to take some time before most new members have the ability and the confidence to take up the sole responsibility for holding their part against the other three parts. Several of my interviewees have been or are currently part of a quartet while one had no interest in this particular form of the hobby. N. described for me what it was like being in a quartet.

...It's the most frustrating thing you could ever do...It's got great highs and great lows. The highs because there is so much more thrill for you as you are the one making the chords ring...But there are difficulties in getting four people in the same place at the same time...it's extremely demanding on time and energy...The camaraderie between you is quite special...when it's really good you feel wow...(Interview Six from field work for Soci 602).

While many members may find it takes some time before they are successful in becoming part of a quartet, Stebbins suggests that those who do find that once the difficulties are overcome the benefits mostly outweigh the costs.¹⁸

In his studies of the men's and women's barbershop organisations in Canada, Stebbins reported that disengagement¹⁹ seems to be delayed well passed that of any 'work' career, which reflects the strong attachment for barbershop held by those who take this hobby seriously. A good number of the members of the barbershop organisations are committed at a very deep level to their hobby, so much so that it may take a death or transfer away from the area to break that association. Some will delay taking up the hobby or may have a temporary break away for family or business reasons. This appears to be the experience in the case of the Christchurch Chorus. I have anecdotal evidence of members leaving for family or business reasons with the intention of returning to the chorus at a later date.

Stebbins also reviewed the motivational aspects of this hobby by exploring the "thrills and disappointments" as well as the costs and rewards that can be found in barbershop. In his study, the participants identified competing as one of the greatest thrills and while this was the most frequently mentioned pleasure, other thrills came from singing well in front of a receptive audience.²⁰

The disappointments found by Stebbins ranged from low placement in competitions (particularly in the case of women) and the lack of commitment of some members towards rehearsals and sing-outs on the part of both men and women. While my inquiries didn't extend to the same cost analysis carried out by Stebbins, disappointment about other members was not mentioned by any of my interviewees. (There did appear to be a slackening of rehearsal attendance when the Director was away.)

Stebbins reported that few casual members stayed with either the men's or women's organisation. This is because the level of commitment required of members in

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 52.

¹⁹ Disengagement is the term used by Stebbins to describe the process by which a member of a chorus removes himself/herself from their "serious leisure career".

attending rehearsal, and the personal practice time required away from rehearsal to develop the necessary skills, is considerable, and tends to appeal only to those who take on this hobby seriously and work at it.²¹ He also found that compared with other hobbies those who were committed, stayed with the chorus for very long periods of time.

Max Kaplan's (1991) case study was undertaken at a convention of the men's organisation in Hartford USA in 1987. Represented at this convention were chapters and districts of the entire United States, along with groups from Canada and England.²² He described the barbershop organisation as a "many-splendored thing". Without these "splendours", he suggested, it would be impossible to explain the total barbershop experience. There are twelve of these "splendours" which give form and substance to this experience and make it possible to explore the organisation as a unique group.

The twelve "splendours" described by Kaplan²³ are made up of the musical, social, therapeutic, historical, democratic, community-service, theatrical, leadership, educational, moral experiences and the experience of identity and self-respect.²⁴ These twelve experiences appear to fit the experiences of the women in my case study almost without exception. This may not be surprising considering that the women's organisation was formed by women who were in close family contact with the men's organisation fifty or so years ago.

But as Kaplan²⁵ suggests, the demographic and cultural changes which have taken place in the latter half of the twentieth century make it unique, especially considering the growth of both men's and women's groups during this time. Both these groups have grown and spread throughout the world. These organisations and their unique experiences appear to offer something to the men and women which they can embrace

²⁰ Ibid, p 57.

²¹ Ibid, p 56.

²² Kaplan, M. (1991) *The Barbershop Harmony Society A Many-splendoured Thing. Essays on Leisure*. Associated University Presses, Inc. p85-86.

²³ Ibid, p 86.

²⁴ Ibid, p 87.

²⁵ Ibid, p 86.

wholeheartedly and which my respondents reported they had not experienced on any other level or in any other leisure activity.

Kaplan suggests that the organisation continues to thrive because of the nature of amateur attitudes. The members freely choose to belong to this group because they want to. Their enjoyment has to include their fellow chorus or quartet members as well as the music, because if they did not like these associates they would get out of the group.²⁶ This then leads to a "remarkable phenomenon" according to Kaplan²⁷. He suggests that:

...in this music, sung by amateurs, a way exists to bring together, and keep together, men whose occupations, religions, family styles, educational backgrounds, religious and ethnic backgrounds would ordinarily keep many of them apart: black from white, Jew from Catholic, rich from poor, Ph.D. from unlettered, young from old.²⁸

The phrase "music is a universal language" could explain why the barbershop organisation can act as a link between diverse people and different times. Kaplan further suggests that research into what he describes as "almost a subculture in American life" may reveal how it is that a

...large group of people, not necessarily in physical contact, who share some common interests that are significant enough to them [are able] to develop a unity of outlook that is recognized by them and by outsiders.²⁹

Another aspect of the barbershop organisation is the management structure. Kaplan describes the men's organisation as unique because all of the office holders are barbershoppers. This model can equally be applied to the women's organisation. In Kaplan's words:

One doubts that there is a parallel to this democracy in any organisation of this size, anywhere. Its implications are immediate: in the kinds of communications among all levels; in the close understanding that the administration has of every detail of chapter detail;... in the appreciation of all

²⁶ Ibid, p 96.

²⁷ Ibid, p 96.

²⁸ Ibid, p 96.

views on debatable issues.³⁰

Kaplan chooses a number of models which he uses to understand these relationships. Two of his models are that of a religious and educational structure. He describes the religious model as

...re[lying] heavily on symbols, rituals, ceremonies, all central to the common tradition; on the wisdom of elders, however defined; on...heroes...; on moral guidelines and holy writings. Here the commitment, from top to bottom of the hierarchy, is a system of common belief and faith.³¹

Kaplan suggests that the religious model described above

...seems most closely akin to the Society's ethic, sense of morality, and preservation of a tradition. Its body of musical literature, carefully approved by special judges; its authorities (certified judges, arrangers); its chapter symbols and rituals its "cathedral" in Kenosha (headquarters); its annual retreat (Harmony College and district sessions); its annual festivals and pilgrimages (competitions); ...the loyalty of its members - these are all religious parallels and elements.³²

I found an echo of these sentiments in my own interviews where the experience of singing barbershop was related by one respondent to that of a religious event experienced as a child. As many women have sung when young and then often not again until they come into contact with barbershop, this new experience may remind them of times when they were part of a church-attending family. (Interview Four from field work for Soci 602).

Kaplan describes the Harmony College "...as one of the Society's best sources for the renewal of the faith". From his observations at an annual Harmony College open only to seven hundred participants each year, Kaplan describes the dual purpose of this retreat as meeting the "highest standards of guardianship and ...a major antidote or preventative tonic for the schisms that are potential in any society of committed

²⁹ Ibid, p 97.

³⁰ Ibid, p 98.

³¹ Ibid, p 99.

³² Ibid, p 100.

persons".³³ The retreat serves to "*energize* by physical and mental withdrawal with a limited group of fellow spirits" to "*immerse* this group in fundamental enthusiasm through intensive intellectual and emotional experiences" and to "*enrich* those in retreat by adding insights that can be brought back to others".³⁴ The educational model he finds in the classes which he suggests could be considered "unique to this enterprise" with particular emphases on the "relevance" of "theory to practice".³⁵

The religious model and the best of an educational model are interwoven throughout the seven days of the Harmony College. The religious model is served by the twice daily massed singing (devotional) and in Kaplan's words the "emotion of religiosity runs deep in the indescribable richness of the sound that emerges from seven hundred men who know how to sing."³⁶ The educational model comes through the classes in "...music fundamentals (arranging, songwriting, physics, choral directing, repertoire)..." as well as a variety of other topics such as "...scoring categories, scriptwriting, [and] how to teach what you know".³⁷

According to Kaplan there is plenty of opportunity for the exchange of views and opinions during breaks in the sessions. The important elements in this opportunity are the range of ages and experiences and the wide cultural differences of the attendees plus the presence of faculty and current administrators. This ensures an open exchange of views which can be the best preventative measure to a loss of harmony in the singing or in ideas regarding the future for the Society.³⁸ Kaplan concluded that there could be "no better example of creative bonding and collective growth than this remarkable retreat". These experiences are not limited to this particular college of seven hundred but are also repeated in districts throughout the world of barbershop, bringing all the members into the fold of these models.³⁹

My observations at the South Island workshop weekend in November 1999 and my previous personal experience at conventions and retreats lead me to agree with

³³ Ibid, p 100.

³⁴ Ibid, p 100.

³⁵ Ibid, p 102.

³⁶ Ibid, p 101

³⁷ Ibid, p 101.

³⁸ Ibid, p 101.

³⁹ Ibid, p.101

Kaplan's description of the nature of such events. They can be incredibly uplifting for the participants, whether male or female and at home or abroad. They can certainly be described as a highlight of a serious leisure career and ones that those who are immersed in this hobby will want to and do repeat as often as possible. These events explain why the "devotees" as described by Stebbins continue this career well beyond the time when most would be expecting to retire if it was a revenue-earning career.

Conclusion

The women's organisation of Sweet Adelines International has something special to offer women. First and foremost it offers a unique form of communication to its members. They are able to experience and express emotion and respect for each other through their singing. There is a feeling of community which develops through this communication process. This communication is not only between the members of the chorus but is also with the audience large and small in whatever setting they may be found.

In barbershop singing the focus is on perfecting the harmonies or the unity of sound. The unity of sound allows for an experience of "flow" as described by Csikszentmihalyi⁴⁰ in which the individual becomes "at one" with the activity. Several members of the Christchurch Chorus, the focus of my research, described being "hooked" on first experiencing barbershop and "getting caught up in the tide of sound and being swept away with it all". They experienced a "oneness" with the other members and saw them as "like having ninety sisters" in their own chorus and they also experienced a global relationship with members in other countries.

The closeness of the relationship between members can be experienced more fully by the members of a quartet. Each quartet member has to take total responsibility for her part in the harmonies and each member must rely completely on and have total trust in the other three for the harmonies to be unified.

⁴⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975) *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco. p. 36.

When members socialise together, males are excluded. There appears to be a parallel with the concept of "mateship" in the exclusivity of these social gatherings. There is a preference for the company of the other members and non-members may have difficulty in experiencing the same level of closeness. The intense experience of performing together at competition and in "mass" sings may mean that the "hobby" becomes a chosen lifestyle for some members while at the same time forging a bond and a unity of purpose which makes for the deepest kind of friendship.

Robert A Stebbins has designated barbershop singing as a "serious leisure" activity in the form of a hobby. There are a number of important components to this concept as defined by Stebbins. These include perseverance, career path, a settling in phase, an advancement phase and a disengagement from the activity. Stebbins described the benefits of serious leisure activities as those of self-actualisation, self-enrichment, feelings of group accomplishment and the enhancement of self-image. Those involved with this and other "unique social worlds" will also experience special norms, beliefs, values, morals, events, principles and traditions which play an important part in participants "identifying strongly with their avocation".

A number of experienced members of the Christchurch Chorus appear to have developed a "serious leisure" career with the organisation. They are contributing to the chorus and organisational life by being members of quartets, undertaking personal development in their singing and taking on service roles at chorus and regional level. When the chorus members take on these roles they gain many skills and are empowered in their outside roles at work, at home or in society. The sense of community which appears to be unique in this group reflects the development of beliefs, values, morals, principles and traditions as described by Stebbins.

Education is strongly promoted within the international women's organisation, whose mission statement is to "educate women to sing four-part harmony, barbershop style, to develop an appreciation for the art form, and to give public and private performances". This education is promoted throughout the world by chorus retreats and workshops as well as the annual conventions which are held in each region and which culminate in an International Education Symposium held in the United States

each year. All members are entitled to attend and learn from these educational opportunities.

One of the most important people in the chorus is the Director. She leads the chorus when performing, motivates the chorus at rehearsals and provides the vision for the future which all members can then "own" for themselves. (Both Stebbins and Kaplan found in their studies that a weak director can have a debilitating effect on a chorus.) The chorus members place a great deal of trust in each other and especially in their Director. The Director in turn trusts each member to do the best that she can to reach her full potential as a chorus member. In this way they help their chorus to reach the level of excellence which is the goal of their performance. While individually each member has to take responsibility for themselves they in turn expect the Director to lead them to excellence in competitions.

Max Kaplan described the men's barbershop organisation as a "many splendor'd thing" in his case study at a men's convention in 1987. He described twelve "splendors" which gave form and substance to the barbershop experience and made it possible to explore the organisation as a unique group. These splendours were musical, social, therapeutic, historical, democratic, community-service, theatrical, leadership, educational, moral and experiencing identity and self-respect.

Kaplan suggested that the organisation was unique in that it had continued to grow and spread throughout the world while many demographic and cultural changes were taking place over a period of many years. It seemed to me and to many of my participants that the women's organisation also had something unique to offer which women had not experienced in other organisations.

That the barbershop organisations continue to thrive Kaplan puts down to the nature of amateur attitudes. He suggests that because members freely chose to belong to their chorus, their enjoyment must include their fellow members as well as the music they sing. Kaplan felt that this led to a "remarkable phenomenon" of bringing together men who would not ordinarily have the opportunity to be in each others' company.

Kaplan describes the "universal language" of music as making it possible for the barbershop organisation to act as a link between diverse peoples and different times. He also suggested that further research could usefully be undertaken into this "subculture". The management structure of the men's and women's organisations is also unique in that everyone of its office holders or board members is also a barbershopper.

According to Kaplan the relationships within this structure can be understood through a religious or education model. The religious model can be seen in the "...body of musical literature, its authorities (judges), its chapter symbols and rituals, its cathedral (headquarters), its annual retreat and its festivals and pilgrimages (conventions and competitions)". The educational model is reflected in the "music fundamentals" of arranging, songwriting, physics, choral directing, and repertoire as well as topics such as scoring categories, scriptwriting and "how to teach what we know". These models are demonstrated in the international men's "Harmony College" held annually in the United States and restricted to seven hundred members from throughout the world.

These retreats are a feature of both the men and women's organisations and are an opportunity for members to develop a greater understanding of their art form while at the same time giving them the time and opportunity to develop the close bond which is needed to perfect the unity of sound required to sing perfect harmonies.

Both the men's and women's barbershop societies appear to offer their members a unique bond of closeness and an emotional experience which has been described by Stebbins and Kaplan in their studies. I have found this reflected in my own experience and in my fieldwork. Time and time again my participants told me about how special they found it being members of such a chorus, region and international organisation.

While Stebbins and Kaplan have made considerable contributions to the study of barbershop as serious leisure, little previous work if any has been done in New Zealand. Other areas which may provide useful material for understanding the dynamics of group musical and emotional experience could be other large scale

performance groups such as the kapa haka which have their own annual competitions.

It seems to me that "the universal language of music " as expressed through the barbershop organisations has something positive to offer men and women in helping them come to terms with the complexities of modern day life. As Max Kaplan has suggested it is able to bring together diverse people and keep them working together towards a common goal, striving for excellence while having a therapeutic effect on their lives.

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Appendix

Women Performing: Creating a bond through harmony.

This report is a qualitative sociological study of women who belong to a intensive performance orientated group of a cappella singers. They are part of a much larger organisation, Sweet Adelines, which began in the United States of America over fifty years ago. It now has links to tens of thousands of women in similar choruses throughout the world. From this very limited field-study it appears that the members of the Christchurch chorus have developed a special relationship, through striving for a common purpose, which has created a bond between them as "sisters" in harmony. It can be liken to the concept of "mateship" as defined for males in New Zealand.

Singing has a special significance for people; whether male or female alone or together. Throughout history it has been used as a unique form of communication; a way of uniting people and creating a bond. Not only is the music, the sound and the harmonies important but so are the words. They give people the means to communicate in a way which can be recognised universally.

Women love to talk to each other, but there are disadvantages in this form of communication in that only one person can speak at a time. When the women of a Sweet Adeline's chorus sing together in four part harmony, they are communicating not only with the Director and through her to the audience beyond, but also with each other. Many feelings and emotional experiences can be expressed in this unity of sound. The time they spend learning how to make the performance as flawless as possible harmonically and vocally creates the unity of sound experienced by those who listen, the audience.

For any four women who form a quartet this experience is the most intense because they are self directed. They can "speak" directly to the audience. When the quartet is rehearsing they tend to stand together turned inward in a semicircle to allow for a greater appreciation of how each part fits in the song. They can decide how they want to "sell the song" without interpretation from the director. This makes the

communication one of much greater intensity for the singers. The relationship which is built through the experience of performing is one which these women have not found anywhere else.

It seemed to me that this experience could be described as parallel to that which men in New Zealand have known for some time. The concept of "mateship" for men appears to describe a closeness of experience and a bond between men which has been formed through defining experiences. The women of Sweet Adelines also have a defining experience of unity which creates a bond not experienced in other areas of their lives. For men "mateship" can be seen in the male's preference for other male company in social situations. In interviewing these women I also found the expression of this preference. While it could be said that this is in the nature of men and women generally it occurs particularly when either gender has had a moving emotional experience of some kind while in the pursuit of a strongly preferred goal. Whether it is on the sports field or on the risers both male and female are molded by the creation of this bond.

When the women of this chorus socialise together many of them feel that this social communication is best if it is limited to the chorus members themselves. This is not because they don't love or want to be with their husbands or partners, but because something happens in the process of continuous rehearsals, workshops, coaching weekends and performing which makes this an experience that can't easily be shared. Performing for that vital six minutes which it takes to become the champions at their art form, performing in concerts or for the public in other settings. Performing for each other in quartets or small groups can become a chosen lifestyle for many of the members. There seems to be something in this process which forges a bond and a unity of purpose which makes for the deepest kind of relationship or friendship.

There are global aspects to this friendship bond. On becoming a Sweet Adeline ordinary women discover not only that they now have more "sisters" than they ever dreamed possible in their chorus, but that they have a relationship with other women all over the world. Anywhere they travel they will find other women doing the same work as them, learning the same songs, practicing the same vowel sounds and singing the same "tags".

This, at times, overwhelming emotional connection is reinforced during "mass" singing, which form part of National competitions in New Zealand. Here hundreds of women sing the same songs and this reinforces the connections between them. At International Conventions in the United States of America thousands of women of all languages can do the same. Through these connections and experiences there develops a recognition, that, while you may be an individual alone on the risers with an individual's responsibility to sing to your potential, you can never be without friends again while you are part of this global sisterhood.

History and Background

Sweet Adelines began with a group of women who enjoyed singing close harmony. The organisation came into being in 1945 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The only requirements for joining the original group were that it was limited to women and that they should want to have fun and enjoy singing. Within four years the group had grown to more than 1,500 members who were singing in 35 chapters and 60 quartets in 14 different states. They had adopted bylaws and elected national officers, and created a system for adjudicating national annual competitions to select the best women's barbershop quartet.

The systems of governing and parliamentary procedure, finances and leadership development which were created by the original women have been updated for technological changes but still continue in much the same form as they did 53 years ago. The original purpose for Sweet Adelines was to educate, teach and train its members in musical harmony and appreciation. This objective was reached by encouraging and promoting barbershop quartets and other groups and giving public and private performances.

Today there are choruses and their associated quartets throughout the world. In New Zealand there are seven hundred women members in twenty-three choruses with approximately twenty-five quartets formed from those choruses. My research has been with the Christchurch chorus. There are ninety plus women who are members of this chorus. The Director has a long term goal to increase the numbers to one hundred

and twenty members on the risers. Christchurch chorus also has a number of women who are members of quartets.

Choosing a Research Group and Gaining Acceptance.

When looking for a suitable subject for research I immediately thought of this group as I had been a member of the Marlborough chorus before moving to Christchurch. My experience as a member of a Sweet Adeline chorus was a defining one which came at a very difficult time in my life. I found that the experience empowered me in such a way that I was able to find a new direction for my life because of the personal growth that I had achieved while in this organisation. It seemed to me that there was something unique to this group which would be of interest to me and possibly to them, which could come from an exploration and inspection of these unique aspects.

I contacted the current President to sound her out on whether permission to do my research would be likely to be received favourably. After explaining my idea to her, she told me that the Director and several other leaders in the chorus were away in the United States of America, at an International Educational Symposium. However, she felt that the idea had merit and she would talk to some of the other leaders that were still in Christchurch and get back to me. Permission was obtained from her and the other leaders to go ahead on the understanding that I would attend the next chorus rehearsal and explain my research proposal to the members and seek their permission.

When I stood in front of the chorus and explained what I wanted to do I felt I had a responsibility to respect the trust they were showing in me by allowing me access to their lives. While most of the members gave their permission freely there was one exception. This dissenting voice was from a member who was concerned that I did not take any "mana" from the chorus in the research process. As my intention was not to criticise but rather to explore and inspect I felt I was able to give assurance that that was not my objective. I was known to many of the chorus members from the competitions and workshops I had attended previously as a member of the Marlborough chorus so this may have helped to get their acceptance my research proposal.

I had many more members volunteer to be part of the research process than I was able to interview in the time available. In collecting the data I combined several observations with six interviews from various members. I tried to keep a balance by interviewing at least one member from each section and several of those who currently hold a leadership role within the chorus. Many of my interviewees were also members of working quartets which gave me an insight into this aspect of chorus life. While I would have been surprised to discover no problematic aspects in the research, I hope that on balance my report reflects the positiveness, energy and commitment which is a feature of this group of women.

I was concerned with keeping the confidentiality of the members and the group from my associates because not only had I given my word that their privacy would be respected but I felt that with a group of this size there was a good chance that my classmates would know of a member if the group's name was revealed. For this reason where used, all names have been changed. While I have revealed the organisation in this report I have done that on the assurance that this report will not be read by other than those who are authorised to do so.

In being a known participant observer I felt I had an obligation to offer my services to the chorus in return for them allowing research to place. I have therefore offered to help out in any way that I can at any upcoming workshops or conventions where extra hands are always needed.

While carrying out the research I attempted to keep in mind that I was no longer a member of this organisation. I felt that I needed to take a step back from the chorus because I have had an intimate relationship with the organisation in the past. I still miss the relationships and the experiences that I had enjoyed at that time. This knowledge engendered a degree of anxiety for me in the early stages that I would not be up to the task I had taken on. As time went on I found that having the interviewees words to describe their feelings about belonging to this group helped me to overcome this early stress.

Gathering the Data.

The data gathering period was limited to nine fieldwork hours and on that basis alone the picture I am presenting could not give a full and final account of this group. A much longer and larger study would be necessary for that to be the case. However I do feel that the discoveries I have made in this short time are worthwhile exposing for closer examination.

My observations were limited to three chorus rehearsals which are held once a week. I was not able to observe a rehearsal with the Director as she was away on the occasions that I attended. I was also not able to observe the chorus at a performance because none took place during my research period. An unfortunate break for a family death also constrained my ability to follow up on some aspects of the organisation which I felt were important.

The process of recording my observations took the form of long hand notes which I then transcribed at the earliest possible moment after the observation session. All the interviews I undertook were recorded and transcribed within the week of the interview. I didn't start the coding and analyse proper until towards the second third of the research period. Though each piece of fieldwork did include a short analyse of the major defining experiences or quotes which stood out for me at the time.

In beginning my analysis I went back to my original research proposal to see what I had learned and if anything had change from my original intentions. My defining precept was that there was something special about this group which in starting out I did not have the words to describe. I now feel that I have made some discoveries along the way that give me a clearer picture of the reasons women find this group so attractive.

Barbershop Definitions.¹

There are some important terms which require explanation because they are particular to this art form. It is also referred to a craft. Cappella comes from the Italian for chapel. A cappella means in the manner of the chapel. The term is used to describe any choral music that is sung without instrumental accompaniment. The pitch pipe is

¹ <http://www.sweetadelineintl.org/barbershop-definitions.cfm>

a chromatic scaled instrument which is blown to establish a pitch or key tone. Most a cappella singers including barbershop singers use one which is small, round and has thirteen pitches.

The mass sing is a Sweet Adeline tradition. It is usually a public event and is part of a convention or competition gathering. All the barbershop singers gather in a public place and sing a selection of songs to demonstrate the barbershop harmony. It is often used to thank the city which is hosting the gathering. Lock and ring is the ultimate barbershop sound. To achieve it requires excellence in all phases of singing; a good musical arrangement, good vocal technique, well balanced and blended voices and accuracy of intonation. In combination these qualities can create an audible overtone that sends a chill up the spine of singers and listeners alike.

The tag is the final portion of a barbershop arrangement, which usually contains very interesting chord progressions that are fun to sing. Tags may be sung separately from the song and are often used both by quartets and choruses for the purpose of practicing to achieve complete chord excellence.

Barbershop Criteria.²

There are a number of factors which make barbershop singing emotionally satisfying to both the listener and the performer. It is sung in four parts, has easily remembered melodies and clear and understandable lyrics. It is difficult to perform because it requires great vocal skill and is usually sung by amateur singers. All the chords must be heard with clarity requiring singers to sing precise intervals. It requires energy and physical involvement from the singer to a degree not usually found in other choral forms and had unlimited artistic potential.

Management Structure.

The Christchurch chorus is organised in the same way as all other choruses throughout New Zealand, the United States and the rest of the world. The Director is the leader of the chorus but does not have voting rights on the Board. There is usually a formal contract in place between the Board and the Director concerning the

² <http://www.sweetadelineintl.org/barbershopcriteria.cfm>

Director's responsibilities to the chorus and the chorus's responsibilities to the Director.

The Christchurch chorus has a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and twelve other Board members. There is also a non-voting chorus Coordinator who works as a liaison between the Director, the President and the chorus. There is also a Music team which includes the Director, two assistant directors, the section leaders, tape assessors and the visual design team. Their responsibilities include choosing the music, preparing learning tapes, assessing tape auditions, learning choreography and preparing videos as learning tools for the members.

The Director.

I interviewed the Director during one of her short returns to Christchurch. I was concerned about how she would feel about my research because she had been away overseas when the decision was made by the executive who were here at the time. I found her very receptive to the idea and enjoyed talking to her regarding her chorus. She had been instrumental in setting up the Christchurch chorus on her return home having discovered barbershop singing while working in Canada. While there she had sung with a chorus as a baritone and a quartet as a tenor.

She is the only Master Director in New Zealand and the Christchurch chorus are the National Champions having scored over six hundred points in the last competition. That puts the chorus up on a level with the better American choruses. She is also a Regional Board member responsible for the musical education of all the Sweet Adeline members throughout New Zealand.

She described for me the "special qualities" required for directing at her level. She ascribes her abilities to a love of music, an ability to interpret music, being able to show emotion and "direct from the heart instead of the hands and brain". She told me that this ability comes from the heart. She is able to "guide them [the chorus women] towards high achievement". This is done without "fear of failure...losing mana...ego hurt...accepting that you might get hurt ...everything [that she is, is laid] out on the line". This driving force was what made her different. She suggested that all the high level directors have these traits, and they are born with them, "it's a natural ability".

While it is possible to learn technical skills, the extra something that is needed to take people to the higher level cannot be learnt.

The chorus members that I interviewed in many cases told me that the Director had been one of the reasons that they had been attracted to this chorus. She had a major effect on some of them.

A: I remember initially, when I first met... [the Director]... She just actually blew me away, and I just found her so charismatic that I didn't even care if I didn't sing. I just wanted to be there to watch her... I had never met anyone like her before and ... I don't know she just was amazing and I just wanted to know how this woman operated it was just so unbelievable...(Laughing)...to me she was so charismatic and so on this big high pedestal! It was like you didn't dare go over (quietly) and ask anything. I would ask somebody something and they would say "Go ask [the Director]" and you would go (catch breath) Oh no I couldn't do that! You know! So! I mean you know now that you can ask virtually anything.

Me: Right

A: And its certainly fine, but (pause) to me as a new person she was just a God! I guess. (Interv 1 A)

Annie also suggested to me that the Director was very respected by her peers in New Zealand, other chorus Directors, because of her "strengths and knowledge".

The director described the special nature of Sweet Adelines as having a camaraderie not found in other groups. People form lifelong friendships. From a directors point of view

"...you may love all the chorus members even if you don't necessarily love them as individuals...You can love them for the interactions which happen while you are involved in the music..."

Because the group is essentially a performance group, there is more harmony and they perform more, fundraise more, and socialise more than other musical groups. They also travel together. The main focus for the organisation is education which encourages a unity of purpose.

Hooked.

Many of my interviewees used the word "hooked" in describing their first experience of the chorus. Annie described her arrival at the "Open Night" for new members as:

"...I went along and I was hooked from day one...it was just the greatest experience...it sort of blew me away the whole experience really. I got caught up in the whole idea of it...The music and the sound and just the atmosphere ...you just get swept away with it..."(Interview Four).

Another member Jane expressed her reason for feeling that this was a very special group.

"When I first went along I was absolutely overwhelmed...all the greetings and the friendliness..." (Interview Five).

She also felt to some degree that she had to protect herself from these feelings.

"You could very easily turn it into that whole lifestyle thing...and then one day I would be left without it and then I would be so absolutely lost so I have got to keep other things going as well." (Interv. 5. A).

Supporting Each Other.

It seemed to me that one of the major differences between this group of women and other choir type groups is the feedback and support they constantly offer each other. Barbershop singing appears to engender a closeness which is essential to the art form. The members trust each other and put themselves in the hands of their Director and other leaders. Because many of them have taken their turn in these leadership positions they understand the work that is involved in keeping everything running smoothly.

A: We just all really work together, just all there for the same reasons because we love what we're doing, we love singing, the companionship, something that we as women are doing for ourselves. We are just all striving for excellence I guess and we all really want to be the very best that we can be. And this lets us do that. (Interv. 1 A).

Annie suggested that the women see each other in a relationship which is rather like a family or a small community. But at the same time it's more than that because these women are not related, rather they have a common purpose and a bond formed from striving to achieve perfection.

A: We just enjoy each others company.

Me: Yeah. So its more than just a chance to go along and sing.

A: Its like having ninety sisters which you don't have to buy birthday presents for,...(laughs)... We are all best of friends I suppose and we just really like each other.(Interv 1 A)

Sections.

The music is sung in four parts which are the sections of bass, baritone, lead and tenor from bottom to top. Sweet Adelines International describes the art form as being characterised by a strong bass line. The basses must be, in the Directors words "going for it or the chords don't sit aligned." The baritone section has the most difficult part to learn. The lead section sets the standard for the chorus. They are responsible for putting emotion and drive into the music, they have to concentrate more and the singing techniques required of the leads are more difficult. The tenor is responsible for finishing the chord so their part fits at the top of the chord.

The sections are reputed to have different personalities and appear to share a different emotional bond with the members of their section. Several of my interviewees described how different they felt when they changed from one part to another. The tenors are considered to be light and fluffy or dizzy. They sing in a heady part of the voice are quite independent and don't share with each other to the same extent that some of the other sections do. While the basses will choose to have a Christmas BBQ the tenors are more likely to have tea and cakes at a section get together.

The leads are the biggest section with about forty members. They can either be very confident or lack confidence, introverts or extroverts and require a lot more development. They appear to be less supportive of each other though overall are more independent. They are less likely to attend their section practice than any of the other members.

The baritones, because their notes are very hard spend a lot more time together and do a lot more bonding and section recognition. They, along with the basses are much more likely to bring along a plate to a section practice and then spend time afterwards talking about the depths of life and family. The basses are known throughout the world of barbershop as party people. According to the Director they just get on with having a good time, though sometimes this can be at the expense of their musical ability. However they are usually the highest scoring section in competition even though only a few of the bass section read music. They appear to do a lot more for each other like remembering birthdays and this shows in the cohesiveness of this section

Singing and Socialising Together.

The chorus members are socialised through their sections and learn to sing together in those sections and with them in the wider chorus. The objective of the performance is to have perfect unity and harmony of notes, vowels, intonation and breath control. The striving to achieve ever higher and higher levels comes through the constant education of the members in the singing techniques they need to use to achieve these standards. The sections also rehearse intensively and its this unity of purpose which makes the chorus such a satisfying experience.

Women who in the past may not have been encouraged to do something for themselves find when they come into the chorus that they are constantly praised and encouraged to keep trying by all the other members. One of my interviewees described this for me.

"...when you first start it does your ego so much good because everybody thinks you are so wonderfully and so helpful. They say things like you know you can do this and Gosh you are doing so well and you think "Wow (laughs) this is preddy cool." You know? And so you just have to keep your feet on the ground.

This interviewee and others gave me some ideas about what it is in this organisation which binds the women and keeps them continually striving to learn and improve.

Helan lives three quarters of an hour away from the city so, in that respect, represents the tenacity of the women that are part of my sample group. It takes a considerable effort and willingness to commit, to keep people like her coming to rehearsals. I recognise this experience of commitment, because as a member of a smaller chorus, I also had to travel some distance each rehearsal night as did several others.

Helen has been part of the chorus since 1992 and feels that it is the experience of always learning that keeps her going to rehearsals. She feels that there are endless possibilities for learning which means that there is no reason for people to get bored with it. While some older members may have given that as a reason for leaving Helen feels that there is another reason for this. She thinks that the level that the chorus has reached with their performances are so much higher than they were when she joined. Some older members who came in at that lower level didn't grow with the chorus. The levels became too high and so they chose to opt out. For those, however who are keen these requirements form part of the challenge that they take on board when they commit to being a chorus member.

Being a member of this group means that individual members were molded by the experience. The new members find that they have to meet certain expectations of behaviour in the group and older members learn to accommodate the ideas and behaviour of new members as they are assimilated into the chorus. Both parties learn to adjust to allow the new member to fit in. Though as other interviewees have suggested this process can take some time before the new member feels a sense of belonging to the group. It appears that it can take up to twelve months to be fully assimilated into this or any other chorus. This was certainly my experience on joining the organisation.

Helen felt that the harmony and the music were instrumental to this process. There is a special bond that develops through the common love of music. What you are trying to achieve forces an appreciation of other's abilities and helps to develop a greater level of tolerance than may be found in other groups. Having to learn to sing in unity and harmony in four parts means learning to respect the differences as part of the process. Helen also talked about the need to "learn to fit in" because of the differences in the traits of the sections themselves.

Other interviewees told me how the women feel about social occasions. There appears to be a very strong feeling amongst the women that even on social occasions it's much better if the men are excluded. The women are able to enjoy each other's company much more if the husbands or partners are not there. The women are able to in her words "have a good laugh and let [their] hair down". Sarah, felt that this was particularly important for her because she doesn't work so doesn't meet other women outside of the home. She felt that it was really important to be able to

"have a bit of a giggle...and not be surrounded by men's disapproving glares...they just sort of sit there...wanting to be somewhere else...[saying or thinking] Is it time to go home now".(Interv. 5 A)

Sarah suggested to me that while men may also enjoy the company of other men they did not appear to enjoy it to the same extent that these women enjoyed each other's company. While women are sharing their lives, perhaps men are comparing theirs. Sarah also acknowledged that there was a tangible bond between the women in the chorus. This bond enables them to be very supportive of each other in a way which appears to surprise the recipients. Sarah and other interviewees talked about receiving this support particularly in times of family illness or trauma. Sarah felt that the kindness of the other women had helped her to see where she could be more thoughtful towards others.

With ninety or more women it would be very unlikely that one person could like all of them on an individual basis there was a collective extended family feeling and response experienced within the group. Other advantages came as well in that there was always someone who knew someone who could help with whatever was needed. In this way the members were able to network with the other member's connections to their own advantage.

Sarah felt that the Director was very important to the focus of the chorus. She held the group together. She is respected and trusted by the members because of her skills and the members find it hard to remain focused when she is away as much as she has been this year. People were inclined to slack off to some degree when the Director was away. She described the Director as the most positive person she knew. She was a

very strong leader and was able to carry people along with her decisions because of the trust they had in her ability to get it right.

Conclusions.

In this research I tried to answer my original questions regarding the motivational factors which bonded these women to this chorus or organisation. I found that there was a special communication in their singing especially the a cappella harmonies which developed a supportive and empowering relationship between the members. For many women this was a very addictive experience. They seemed to be "hooked" into an emotional experience which gave them something which they may not have experienced at any other time in their lives.

This experience was facilitated by a charismatic leader. The women were continuously challenged to grow and develop not only in their vocal skills but also in the leadership, organisational and personal relationships with each other and the wider community of other barbershop singers. This empowerment can only have a beneficial effect in that the women are learning how to take control of their lives and improve their situations through this experience.

They also appear to have developed a relationship with each other on a social level which can be compared to the "mateship" relationship for men in New Zealand which had developed over time through male experiences of a defining nature.

I feel however that the limits of this report and the field-study work mean that any deeper analysis is not possible without further investigations. An area which has not been included in this report but may have been alluded to is the nature of quartets. While I met a number of women who were members of quartets I was unable to interview a working quartet as a group. This research study was a very interesting experience for me and one that I hope I have been able to see in some way as separate from my own considerable experience as a chorus, quartet and management leader in the Marlborough. While I have some reservations regarding my objectivity in this study I do feel that the insider knowledge I had was very important to my role as a participant observer.